



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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From Garden to Business to Market: Peace Corps Helps Carve a Path to Sustainable Food Security



Peace Corps

A local farmer (center) mixes plant tea, used as a garden fertilizer.

In 2014, with a grant from the Feed the Future-supported West Africa Food Security Partnership, Peace Corps Volunteer Jacob Moore in Cameroon's North West Region collaborated with community partners to organize a six-week course on how to use gardening skills to build a small-scale business. Working with local experts and Cameroon's Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development, the team offered technical training to 45 smallholder farmers, completing fieldwork on why gardening is important, how to handle nurseries, strategies for natural soil improvement, food security, marketing and evaluations.

As a result, 22 trainees have built on what they learned to form a profitable gardening cooperative. Using the seeds and nursed seedlings they received during the training, they have been able to maintain and harvest a 100 percent chemical-free community garden for home consumption and local sale. The farmers saved money by making their own natural pesticides and insecticides, and the cooperative completed its second planting in October 2014. To date they have earned about \$90 in profit –significant in a country where nearly half of the country lives below the poverty line.

Feed the Future caught up with the Jacob Moore, who helped spearhead this project, to learn how he thinks farmer cooperatives can help transform local markets and food security.

What was it like to help local Cameroonians gain new skills and become empowered to start their own business venture in food production?

The truly remarkable aspect of the Upper Moghamo Market Garden is the community involvement. Watching my idea literally take root and blossom in the hands of my community was immensely rewarding.

Through a six-week course, 45 trainees received certificates. The training was designed and facilitated almost entirely by staff from the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development. All of the knowledge and expertise existed in the community already; they just looked to me to organize the key players to turn knowledge into action.

What do you see as the most important outcomes of the training on gardening?

Now, participants have a network of permanent community members they can turn to with problems, ideas and plans for the future to ensure sustainability. Furthermore, the participants themselves have built expertise in gardening, food security and

agribusiness. One of the wonderful things about Cameroon is that people are not selfish with information; once other people see how successful gardening can be and start asking questions, this information will proliferate throughout the community and benefit anyone who's interested in generating more income or putting better food on their tables.

My community is full of hard-working people who simply haven't found a way to transform their labor into a sustainable livelihood. Seeing the power of vegetable gardening, with low costs, huge profit margins and more than enough surplus to cover recurring expenses stirred them to action. This is the kind of project that can continue indefinitely.

Are there any standout successes or anecdotes you can share?

A small story about the success of the garden is from a man who received his first certificate. He did not graduate secondary school and when he graduated primary school they never gave out a "diploma." This man is a successful, respected farmer and a very hard worker in my village, but he does not have any formal documentation representing the work he has accomplished. He told me that the day of graduation from the gardening course, where participants received certificates, was the greatest day of his life. He framed his certificate and hung it up for his children to see. These are the stories Peace Corps Volunteers live to hear.

What do you think is in store for your community in Cameroon now that the gardening cooperative has started to take off?

The community took charge of its own future and organized around this project. This is not a disparate group of individual farmers; this is a community coming together to build something real. With the cooperative, farmers have a support network they can go to for any issue that might arise, be it technical or commercial. They can work together to maintain fair prices and reduce costs.

Perhaps most importantly, they have created a network of like-minded people who can work together in the future to meet the growing needs of a developing community and increase their food security while earning more income.